

Central Boulder Listening Session

November 9, 2015

Discussion Notes



People were asked to suggest key topics for longer group discussion. The longer discussion topics selected are listed below in bold with summary notes.

Suggested topics for discussion: Affordable and Workforce Housing, Transportation, Cost of Living, Density, Environment, Aging Population, Occupancy Limits, ADUs, Density, Council Representation, Growth, CU Growth, Design, Neighborhood Protection, Short-term Rentals, BCH Broadway, Parking, Neighborhood Livability, Traffic, Energy, Climate, Resilience, RGMS, Youth Participation, Lighting, Pearl Street

Topic	Summary Notes
Affordable Housing	
Occupancy Limits	Change to allow 1 person per bedroom (unrelated adults). Quick and easy solution to this problem.
ADUs	Should be encouraged. Will decrease costs. Good option as people age.
Density	Allow more at the edge of neighborhoods and along major streets. An issue is that much of Boulder's high density development is high end and not affordable. Why is the local pushback to consolidating lots and building a larger multi-family structure? Related to zoning.
Density	People are "smarting" about Boulder Junction - feels like a canyon and not enough active ground floors. At the same time, the units are nice and residents like them. Lots of good transportation options. Not all of Boulder needs to be this way, but options in some areas helps address the housing problem. Different neighborhoods can have different things. Space used for parking could be utilized - put it underground and have people pay for it.
AH Funds	With Google and similar companies, should be a way to leverage more \$ for affordable housing. Density bonuses and other tools should also be considered. Increased taxes.
Aging population	ADUs, condos, townhouses are good options as people age. BCH site an option for mixed housing types and age restricted residential. Walkable places allow people to age in place.
Housing Options	Reality in Boulder is people can't afford a single family house with a dog, etc. and people of all ages will need to be in other housing types.

Livability	Is a consistent theme at most Boulder meetings along with aging, transportation and other issues. Many people are nostalgic for the way things were 50 years ago but we live in a different world now and things can't be exactly as they were: mixed use, density, range of housing options alongside preserving neighborhood core. We are headed down the path of becoming like Aspen, where workers are priced out. Every neighborhood needs to take some more density somewhere to address this issue. Design can help make density look more appealing and help a 4-plex fit in with single family homes.
Environment	Large homes are not environmentally friendly and use a lot of resources.
Property Values	Many people say that affordable housing lowers property values and increases crime. But the alternative is a city without people. Affordable housing in Boulder is occupied by workers.
Growth & Transportation / Parking Issues	
Central Area	There are diverse neighborhoods in Central Boulder. It would be great to allow for that in the process. May need to treat the area differently.
Density	It is hard to talk about and understand. Visualization would help. What is density?
ADUs	Goss Grove has a lot - made cheaply. Need better codes and design issues. Rentals and students increase noise. Not as bad as on the Hill. Parking permit pass. Higher density.
Mistakes	Reducing parking requirement for homes. Forces parking on the street. Folsom is a good example of people not ready to give up vehicles. This colors other issues - need to solve parking and transportation.
Right-sizing	Engineering assumptions were erroneous. AMPS recommendations to reduce parking will be a mistake. Need better information - realistic estimates about bikes and street use. E.g. Table Mesa (erroneous info).
Realistic Modeling	Car use associated with development even in downtown with a family - still need to drive a lot. Does the model stop at a commute for part of the day; to avoid unintended consequences address for different times. Bikes on sidewalks = terrifying to some in neighborhoods. Seniors have a hard time.
Short- term rental regulations	Balancing needs in situation with competing values. How to satisfy multiple needs within neighborhoods? Craft changes in a way that doesn't completely change the neighborhood. What is the tipping point with unintended consequences? Thoughtfulness is needed about nuanced change - for some change without too much. Do it in a way that's equitable.
Input	Collect input in slightly different ways - e.g. email, great ideas.
Future	Think about millennials and not just the past. The number with cars is very low. E.g. car share. Can't pave to avoid car congestion. Auto = traffic.
Modeling	Important data suggests that higher density = less driving. Think about cultural changes and technology changes, like self-driving vehicles.

Diversity	Celebrate in the city and neighborhoods that are unique and came up at different times. Empower citizens. Not one size fits all. City can find mechanism to empower people, neighborhoods to act on their own behalf and express local community, plans.
Student (older) perspective	Did projects in Goss Grove (re: homes and garage space) tested parking aspect. Single occupancy vehicles 20:1 on East Arapahoe (thus); 8:1 vs. Sat. More initiatives re: regional SOV.
Regional Transportation	Address people coming in from outside. Work with RTD and other employers e.g. Google. Push hard for regional transportation between communities and future will look different.
Current BVCP	Under the current plan there will be increases in commuters. 60% of workers come in. The ratio can't get worse - it could get worse. We need "feet on ground" re: transportation.
Summary of Group	Range of perspectives but common ground about how we preserve. Need good data as we consider growth or changes. One size does not fit all. Neighborhoods vary. There is interdependence. Think about the future. Be realistic about transportation.
Transportation	
Bus Service	Bus service that has future toward trolley bus i.e. Ft. Collins; Broadway, Pearl, Crossroads, frequent and easy on and off - no schedule.
Regional Bus Service	Free regional bus service with more parking.
Eco-Pass	Survey on eco-pass follow-up. Cost is a barrier to individuals and companies.
Bus Service	Increase bus service from satellite hubs. Increase frequency. Increase easy transfers.
Transit Viability	Kids - dentist, dance, after school projects, public transportation is unlikely; open enrollment. (Senior contributes to carpooling).
RTD	Boulder separate from RTD because the amount of time to get around. It does not serve Boulder specifically. (But it would be difficult to disconnect from system).
Multi-Modal	Increase biking, peds, sidewalks
Transit Options	Tourist bus line that goes to the top spots. Buy a card. Method of payment (not exchange \$) convenient payment.
Options	Neighborhood electric vehicles (1-4 peeps). With dedicated lanes ~ 2-4 mile. E.g. Phoenix and Florida. SHARED.
TOD	Transit oriented development include high quality service. Size-appropriate vehicles.
Bikes	Living lab - increase, breadth. Incentivize biking and electric cycles.

Density	
Height & Density	Without enough density - exporting density to surrounding areas. We don't have sufficient density here. Prove aspect of sustainability. CU campus has high buildings and is a wonderful environment. Variety of buildings in a campus. When you go taller - past 55 ft. - provide articulation. If you go higher - you have to maintain level at sustainability and affordability.
Views	Flatirons - views. We should build east of campus.
Height	11 story building - Presbyterian Manor - no one complains. Don't do 8-9 story buildings everywhere. Established neighborhoods inappropriate for high rise buildings. Does Boulder have places where you can build 35 ft? 55 ft? It's all about where and what places? What are design criteria? Must be planned. Design and location - balance at these things.
Hill	Opportunity by the Hill. Could be mixed housing not just students. Campus employees: students 13th & 11th/10th College to University (to Alfas) Could be easily developed.
Growth Rate	What about Danish plan - 1% limit to growth rate? City services can only support a certain amount of services at a given time.
28th Street	When you come into 28th Street, new buildings part of Outlook Hotel. Cannot develop without res surrounding it.
Lot Sizes	Height isn't just the issue. Code is largely legacy from 1981. Prior to that time 3500 sf. Was size of LR lot in Boulder. Today residential lot is 7000 sf. Need a bigger lot to build low density, incentivizing wealthy couples to live in 5000 sf. Houses.
Mixed Density	Land use and zoning issue. Need to have density mixed use areas. Need to incentivize developers to smaller homes, shared lots.
Accessory Units	Second homes - unused 6 mo of year. Subdividing would create more opportunities for other families, artists, plumbers, students - wish they could live there. ADUs, OAU's granny flats - very restrictive currently. Ability to but kitchenette and rent it out nearly impossible.
Housing	Two things we can't screw up: open space, sunshine, robust economy. How do we create more housing?
Legal ADUs	I don't want to be cheating with my ADU - I want to be compliant.
Parking	Big house - divided into 4 carriage houses. What about parking?
Zoning	Last 1.5 years - Whittier had 4-8 plexes - just down-zoned those neighborhoods. Results in hodge podge - but not in terms of heights - like 5 stories next door.
Change	The city must change zoning and allow growth. We have to say where and how.
Redevelopment	Restrictive redevelopment of Daily Camera building. We end up with undesirable building. We need to let good designers do things.
Change	Things change - need to start thinking about 40 years from now.
Remodel	Neighbors aim to complain when built a 2nd story on his house. When I act like that - I feel a sense of selfishness. No one wants change

Form-Based Code	Will adoption of form-based code help design elements built into code? Form-based code is too prescriptive. Wouldn't have any Haertling buildings with FBC.
Code Issues	Boulder's code almost impossible to do anything here. Boulder is anti-development. Our code and land use rules impact the people most vulnerable.
Impact Fees	Impact fees of 2G North was \$33,000 part of what has happened. Process - don't let designers design.
Development	Developers want to maximize what they can get - leads to bulky structures.
Civic Area	Plan for farmers market will kill farmers market. Civic area Plan - not good for farmers market.
Climate & Energy	
Comp Plan	We should have a major thing about climate in the comp plan. Should be woven in.
Commitment	A lot of interest and commitment. Cap tax passed with 70%.
Innovation	E-town sustainability Conference - moment of pride for us. Energy innovators. People should be more aware that the world is watching Boulder.
Solar	Road blocks put up by PVC concerning solar gardens. Xcel creating road blocks after road block.
Solar	Currently \$2.90 per watt for installation is the break even number. We can produce energy cheaper with solar than with coal with no incentives if Boulder "Got off its butt". People can't afford solar because new homes have so much square footage and the city is allowing builders to build houses that cover more of the lot than is legal.
Solar	Contractors point of view: there shouldn't be solar. Maybe our energy code isn't strong enough. Maybe municipalization can get us to net zero homes?
Youth	Youth-led community engagement about climate. Use culture to start inviting people to author the future they want.
Climate Change	Climate change is the story of our time. Can we tell a new story in time? Have the kids drive us.
Tools	Tools that we can get to activate people cheaply. NCAR tools, etc. Permission to play comes when children are involved. Children bring joy.
Costs	1.75 per watt install cost. Projected to go to \$1 per watt in the future. Today battery storage costs 18 cents per Kwtt.
Comp Plan	We need a whole section in comp plan dedicated to changes to our energy plan / policy / use / engagement.
Redevelopment	If developers are going to scrape, they should need to make it net zero.
Net-Zero Living	We need to reduce the amount of energy we are using. Highlight co-benefits of net-zero living.
Solar	Solar is here. We need to reduce energy usage creatively. We need to engage through culture and young people about climate. This should all be included and fully described in the comp plan.

Neighborhood Protection	
Density	Density is hard to comprehend and talk about - It's different to everyone.
Many Perspectives	Desire for historic preservation. How do we have that kind of conversation to begin to solve this underlying theme? We need to listen to all perspectives of the problem; instead of just voting on it.
Space & control	I want control of my environment and to do what I want with my property. I want control of my investment and to protect my investment throughout the years. I didn't buy into this higher density back then.
Control of my property	Control of my quality of life; safety, neighborhood; my govt on a local level is responsible for my own interest.
Neighborhood interaction	Safety, mutual respect for neighbors. Good communication between neighbors; knowing your neighbors.
Affordable housing	Affordable housing is only nice in theory. It adds density and traffic trips.
Density	Stop trying to change pre-existing neighborhoods. New density should not expand from within neighborhoods. New density should be developed starting from the outside.
Change	A city should continue to grow or remain stagnant. Don't take away from what is unique from old neighborhoods to accomplish new development goals.
Flexibility	New planning mechanisms need more flexibility from the code. Boulder is too rule-based in our zoning code. Wants to look into form-based code. Create a feeling or character in different parts of town. We need more site specific flexibility. E.g. ADUs. Creating density that's more fine-grained instead of spot development. Affordability is not gained by our current methods.
Neighborhood Protection	Political lock up is tied to a lot of these planning-related questions because we get stuck finding solutions. We need to create growth in a way that meshes well in the surrounding area.
CU	Needs more housing since a lot of the growth is related to them. Hold CU accountable. The university is an attractive nuisance. They do not take care of the people they are bringing into town.
Density and Traffic	You cannot increase density without creating more traffic.
Affordability	Land use drives housing costs. We will never catch up to affordability. (SF as an example)
Infrastructure	We need to address real infrastructure issues that are more focused on the residents living in the area.
Housing	Rezone industrial to residential and mixed use.
Enforcement	We do not trust the city to enforce their own laws. Form-based code is a tool that architects and planners can abuse.
Protection	I want to protect my investment, I work really hard for my investment and some people should earn their right to be here.
Rezoning	Zoning commercial to mixed use; enforcing existing regulation.

Development	Let development pay its way.
Neighborhood Protection	Reliability, keep things the same. We want more consistent decisions and planning.
Views	No high-rise buildings - protect the views.
Livability	Livability and site access and property access. Livability is safety, lighting and control over negative influences of the neighborhood (broken bottles, college parties, too dark).